

I appreciate the opportunity to testify on this critical matter. My name is Glenda Ahhaitty, I am from Los Angeles California, an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and am serving my second term on the U.S. Census Bureau Advisory Committee on American Indians and Alaska Native Populations. I am keenly aware of the ramifications of the Census 2000 and its potential impact to my community and am working to prevent a repeat of the 1990 experience. Los Angeles has the largest urban Indian population in the United States, yet most residents of Los Angeles are not aware of the Indian community. Accurate census data is one of the most critical needs of the Los Angeles Indian community and is its greatest barrier to access of needed services.

### **Background**

Indians from the Plains and the Southwest began coming to Los Angeles during the 1920's to make movies. During and after World War II many Indians who moved here to work in War industries. Others came through the area during tours in the military and returned to stay when they were discharged. In the 1950's, the Bureau of Indian Affairs relocated thousands of Indians from across the United States to Los Angeles. Many of the Indians who attended Sherman Indian High School in Riverside California remained in the area after their school was completed.

In the 1950's and 60's lots of Indians worked in the Indian Village at Disneyland. In fact, that is I met my husband. My family came to Los Angeles in 1954 when my father accepted a position with the Union Oil Company. In the mid-1970's I participated with many others in the greater Los Angeles area promoting the Indian community's participation in the 1980 Census. The resulting count was much smaller than was anticipated.

The 70's and 80's were an exciting time of community empowerment and community building for the Los Angeles Indian community. Following is a listing of some the community service created during that time: Los Angeles Indian Center (three sites), the American Indian Free Clinic, the Huntington Park Indian Clinic, the Golden State Gourd Dance Society, Tribal American Day Care - Pre School, Title IV Indian Education Programs in most school districts, the Los Angeles Unified School District American Indian Education Commission, Free Spirit Indian Women's Shelter, American Indian Women On the Move, UCLA American Indian Research Center, four Powwow cultural drum groups, American Indian Athletic Association, United American Indian Business Development, The Los Angeles American Indian Coalition, the Talking Leaf Newspaper, Orange County Indian Center, United American Indian Involvement, Eagle Lodge, the Buzzard's Roust, American Indian Men's Association, American Indian Movement chapter, the Los Angeles City/County American Indian Commission and Indian Community Representatives in most County Departments. Every weekend something was going on such as powwows, ball games or bowling tournaments. Indian community members were active advocates in the community and in national Indian affairs. The Indian community estimated that more than 80 thousand Indians were living in Los Angeles by 1980.

In 1974 I went to work at Rockwell International, Space Division located in Downey California. I worked on the last Apollo launch and had privilege of being a part of the design and development of the Space Shuttle. In about 1981 I had the good fortune to be employed as a member of Rockwell International Community Interface Program representing the American Indian community. One important community initiative that I was a part of was to improve the accuracy of the Indian Census count in the 1990 Census.

As a community we anticipated that the 90 Census would result in a more realistic count. A realistic count that would represent all facets of the Los Angeles Indian population including the number of Indians receiving Indian Health Services from the American Indian Clinic and other Indian community based service providers. It was a shock when the 90 census count was released. The Indian community estimated its population to be over 100 thousand. The official 1990 Census adjusted count was 45, 508. Not only was the count low but the economic profile of the community did not match that of the Indian community. Two thousand Indians had moved out of poverty and the count was 2,000 less than the 1980 Indian population count. It is not logical that the decline in count from 1980 to 1990 could equal the loss of numbers in poverty. That is unless one assumes that only poor Indians left Los Angeles. At the same time more Indians were visible on the side row streets of the City of Los Angeles than ever in the past. How could the Indian community numbers in poverty have declined when more were on the street and using community services? In the same time frame an independent research project funded by the Los Angeles County Area Agency on Aging reported that one of six of those residing in the Skid Row Area were Indian.

In 1986 I accepted a position in engineering at McDonald Douglas on the C17 Program. After six years with Douglas I was laid off (along with many others) and I accepted a position as the Executive Director of the Los Angeles City/County American Indian Commission (LAC/CAIC.) I was tasked by the Commission to find out why the Indian community count was so low in the 90 Census. The first issue that I looked into was to attempt to determine what happened to the skid row count.

An Indian agency, United American Indian Involvement, (UAII) was located in the skid row area providing services to Indians, many of whom were homeless or living in low-cost hotels. The UAII staff had worked during the 90 Census S Night Count. The 90 Census homeless street count was problematic according to Census staff. The count was a population count and little information was collected, at times, legs extending from cardboard boxes on the street were counted and divided by two. The street count was a population count only and the Census long form was not used and the street count was not a part of the data factored in percent in poverty calculation. It appeared that the street count was a part of the reason for the loss of Indians counted in poverty. (Indian community assumption that there was an undercount, as no undercount strata was taken the Indian communities assumption is not a part of the official differential undercount.)

In 1999 there are far fewer Indian programs, services or community activities. The following is a current list of Indian community organizations: Southern California Indian

Center (JTPA and Indian Child Welfare Program), UAII (UAII is now the IHS contractor and provides managed care type referral services, and drug/alcohol rehabilitation), Los Angeles City/County American Indian Commission, 2 Title IX Programs, one 1/2 time County Department Community Representatives (Department of Public Social Services.) No longer is there a day care program, free standing Indian clinic, women's shelter, Indian Center, education commission, residential alcohol treatment services. In addition, there is not a community voice as the Indian community struggles to survive. That is what the loss in Census count cost Los Angeles. This loss is replicated in all of relocation cities. That is why I am involved on the Bureau of Census American Indian Population Advisory Committee though I no longer work for the LAC/CAIC. I am currently the

Volunteer Programs Coordinator for the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. In addition, I am an Indian community elected member of the LAC/CAIC and the Chair of the LAC/CAIC Self Governance Board.

### **Recommendations to improve the American Indian/Alaskan Native Population 2000 Census Count**

- 1) Make a clear determination to count all American Indians/Alaska Natives wherever they reside.
- 2) Implement a Government to Government Consultation Process as a permanent part of the Bureau of Census structure including the establishment of an "Indian Desk" reporting to the Director.
- 3) Recruit and hire qualified employees from the Indian populations for all levels of positions at headquarters and in the regions. Some of these positions in the regions and at headquarters should be permanent positions to prevent reinventing working relationships with Indians every 10 years.

The number of Indians to be employed should be based on the population that they represent and not based on their pre cent of the total population base of the nation.

Current Census employee who reclassify as American Indian after long employment with the Bureau should be requested to provide some form of documentation.

Recruit individuals Indian communities recognize or use Indian Preference employment provisions as in the BIA

Create a verification body such as the Los Angeles County American Indian Employee Verification Board.

- 4) Determine if the current race definition for American Indian supports sovereignty, self-determination for the Indian population. Perhaps the answer is not to consider American Indian /Alaskan Native data collection as race data, but in a separate question (as is the Hispanic Origin) American Indian/Alaskan Native Descent Category.
- 5) Require that methodology for strata, with over sampling if necessary, are developed and undercount estimates be made for reservations, Alaska Native and urban Indian populations.
- 6) Insure that adequate resources are allocated for specific American Indian/Alaska Native promotional/advertising materials for both the reservation and non-reservation Indian populations.
- 7) Insure a permanent American Indian/Alaska Native advisory body is constituted and maintained. This committee could include a separate form the current REAC Committees and one that involves representation from federal agencies charges with responsibility for Indian programs and services, tribal leaders (federal recognized tribes, state recognized), state Indian Affairs representatives and urban Indian community leadership.
- 8) Require that the Department of Labor (other federal department and agencies as well) create a rule like the DOL current rule that states that Hispanic Origin takes precedence over race, stating that American Indian/Alaska Native takes precedence over Hispanic Origin, race and ancestry for purposes of tabulation due to sovereignty treaty rights to enable survival of American Indian populations.

### **Specific 2000 issues, concerns and comments**

I am concerned with large and non-traditional Indian households being fully enumerated. The current plan allows that households with more than six members will be followed with a later interview to capture the other members. Will this follow up include the use of Be Counted forms? If so, the other family members become a part of the population count. In addition, many families have more than one family residing in the household.

These residences should be able to obtain more than one form so that each family's data will be captured.

An issue is an accurate count of children. An example, if a white woman marries and Indian man and they have six children and she later divorces him and marries a white man, how will the Indian children be counted? In Los Angeles there is an average of 500 Indian children, subject ICWA provisions, in foster care every day. There are on a good day, forty foster care certified Indian families available for placement. Most Indian children in foster care are in non-Indian homes. Will the count of these children be lost? There are also Indian children in County Probation Camps and in institutions. These children are seldom accurately identified and their count will therefore be lost to the Indian population. There are a large number of Indian children adopted into non-Indian families despite ICWA provisions: they are forever lost.

A major issue is the accurate identification and enumeration of the American Indian/Alaska Native street population. Those residing in inner city skid row day room hotels, in urban parks, open areas and in unusual housing race and economic information are important to the community. This count is critical to provide funding for their services. Not only will is this population distrust any government contact, but also will even more difficult to count if Indians are not among those conducting the enumeration. Los Angeles is only one city with a large Indian street population. In Phoenix the largest homeless population is Indian. Phoenix shelter service providers report Indian homeless seldom use soup kitchens and other homeless services: however there are not Indian service providers serving this population. The current plan to count this population is service based and will miss most of this Indian street population. One factor that might help is hire Indians who were previously a part of this street population to enumerate them. Census provision regarding not hiring an individual with felony convictions is a barrier to counting this population.

Accurate identification of Indians incarcerated and in-group homes is an issue.

The Census in the Schools is an excellent program. The materials and maps would have been a more exciting and a more useful product in reaching Indian educators and Indian families through their children, if development of the materials had involved consultation with Indian educators. One example is the placement of Indian reservation lands in a small sub-map. It would have been more effective to place the reservations in the states that they are located and the addition of the Indian population numbers as was done with the state population numbers is a simple no cost change that would make the product more interesting to all educators using it while providing for the inclusion of Indian populations.

Census in the Schools should involve specific outreach to Indian JOM; Title IV programs in addition to the BIA and private/church Indian schools. JOM and Title IV programs are a way to reach urban Indian families. The current Census plan is to distribute materials through the Scholastic network to reach teachers

Census Stage 2 training for Partnership Specialist training includes a one hour training on Indians focusing on the Tribal Liaison Program, which is not an adequate length of time to train on tribal relationships and differences and does not meet the need for basic cultural competency. There should be cultural competency training and cross-cultural competency training needs to be provided to all Census staff and enumerators.

I think that the Census theme statement of “Don’t leave it blank” needs to be revisited.

Each of the various Census initiatives and components, address listing, maps, geographic programs, partnership, Census in the Schools, development of an undercount strata, involvement of churches should have Indian tribal and urban consultation and involvement. This should have already occurred and not be an after thought. There is a persistent view among Bureau staff that the Indian committee is requesting special treatment for Indians. That is not the case of my recommendations. Inclusion of Indians in the complete process is the crux of my issues.

### **Closing Comments**

A basic issue with the Bureau is management staff confusing American Indian identity as a race identity only and not as members of Indian nations. The perception of Census staff which has been voiced in meetings is that the Bureau management will not approve doing something for one race group that is not done for another. This has led to systematic exclusion of Indians and has precluded effective government to government consultation. Only the hiring of Indians of various tribal backgrounds in professional positions in all of the various technical areas in the regions and at headquarters will remedy this.

One critical commitment needs to be made and that is the establishment of an Indian Desk within the Bureau that reports to the Director. This is not a new recommendation. The Indian Advisory committee made it consistently throughout the 90s’. In fact, the recommendation was documented in the 90’s committee’s minutes along with the Director of the Census Bureau agreement and commitment to establish an Indian Desk. This agreement was later denied to have been made and here we are once again with less than one year to go and the same issue and worse facing Indian populations to obtain an accurate count. Some Indian professional staffing positions, including the Indian Desk, at the regional level and headquarters need to be permanent positions.

One of the difficulties is that the education process of Census Bureau begins again with each Census. Government to Government consultation needs to be an ongoing process. This consultation will provide a two-way education that will improve all Census surveys

and projects. Census staff has stated that the problems of Indian under count strata will be alleviated by the planned American Community Survey. I cannot believe that the planned American Community Survey will bring any relief to the issues as the Census Bureau is not willing to design a workable method to provide an undercount estimate for urban and reservation populations. This is the single most detrimental factor of Census policy that impacts Indian populations. Each phase of the Census plan for 2000 is based on overcoming the undercount. It results in limited advertising, limited partnership focus, limited tribal consultation. (Note: that the 12.2 percent reservation under count has resulted in positive Indian employment and planning in the Denver Region.) This omits not only urban areas such as Los Angeles but the State of Oklahoma. Indian land in Oklahoma is predominately trust land. None or very limited outreach has taken place in the State of Oklahoma. As is other areas such as Los Angeles, Oklahoma Indian populations will be impacted by limited partnership outreach, inadequate support for tribes and urban complete count committee formation and support.

As has been stated above, employment is a major issue. The Bureau and the Region s can always justify that more than enough Indians have been employed based on their percentage of the workforce and population base. The attached letter from Mr. John Reeder, Regional Director for the Southern California Region notes that .28 percentage of one Indian person is all that is required for Census 2000 based on the per cent of population. In 1990 the Indian population percentage of the total population was closer to full person. By 2010 the Indian population may even be a negative number based on its percentage of the total population. The impact of not just undercount but miss identification of the Indian population and the growing immigrant populations in the United State could lead to the statistical elimination of the Indian population. Economic growth, access to services is based on demographics. What was not achieved by the Indian wars, forced placement in boarding schools, mass relocation to urban areas may be achieved through demographics, the loss of a visible Indian population in the Untied States. Perhaps the answer is not to consider American Indian /Alaskan Native in the race questions on the census form but in a separate question (as is the Hispanic Origin.)

Perhaps a new question that is not race based but one that asks are you of American Indian/Alaskan Native Descent, if yes, name your tribe, and check the box yes or no if you are enrolled. Perhaps this would be a better measure of the American Indian/Alaska Native population.

I thank the Committee for providing the opportunity for this testimony to be presented. I leave these issues, concerns and recommendations in your good hands.